

# An Empirical Study of Enhancing Students' Local Cultural Awareness

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## Abstract

*Aiming at enhancing students' local cultural awareness, a teaching reform has been conducted, in which the book--*Insights into Chinese Culture* is used as a complementary material for English majors in their sophomore year. The paper presents and analyzes the process and results of the reform by using questionnaires, testing and in-depth interviews. The experimental data are analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively by using statistical software. The results of the questionnaire show that current teaching for English majors cannot meet the students' demand in their learning of Chinese local culture. Comparative analysis of post-test scores indicates that the teaching for English majors under the paradigm of open innovation has a significant impact on the students' local cultural awareness. The results of in-depth interview show that the teaching reform has achieved remarkable effect. Based on those analyses, some practical suggestions have been provided to enhance students' local cultural awareness.*

**Keywords:** *local cultural awareness, Chinese culture, cultural aphasia, teaching reform, open innovation*

## 1. Introduction

With the in-depth study of language, culture and communication, the importance of culture teaching in language teaching is increasingly prominent. The integration of cultural education into college English teaching will promote the unification of instrumentality and humanity of English [1]. However, "cultural aphasia" has become the common phenomenon in practical teaching and actual communication [2]. One-way introduction of the target culture has been unable to meet the demand for foreign language talents in today's society. Chinese local culture needs to realize "globalization" through English [3]. In this process, to solve the "culture aphasia" is undoubtedly the most important problem. With the acceleration of globalization process and the improvement of informationization degree, the success of the open innovation model promotes its rapid expansion in various fields, from economy to management, politics, education, and other different fields [4]. Based on the theory of open innovation, to explore the cultivation strategies of local cultural awareness has important theoretical and practical meaning. With a view to provide ideas and reference for enhancing students' local cultural awareness and innovative teaching, this research makes an empirical analysis to a teaching reform which is based on using *Insights into Chinese Culture*.

The rest of the paper includes the following sections: Section 2 discusses the related previous research in local cultural awareness and open innovation. Section 3 illustrates the main contents of the teaching reform. Section 4 explains research design. The discussions about the research results are elaborated in Section 5. A conclusion in Section 6 concludes the paper.

## 2. Literature Review

Quappe and Cantatore (2007) defines cultural awareness as the foundation of communication, involving the ability of standing back from ourselves and becoming aware of our cultural values, beliefs and perceptions [5]. It helps a person to construct more harmonious and professional relationships in a diverse environment. Cultural awareness has emerged over the last few decades as a significant part of conceptualizing the cultural dimension to language teaching [6]. In communication, a cultural process should be understood and culturally based communicative behavior should be emphasized [7]. Cultural awareness is still rooted in a conception of national language and culture [8]. It's unwise to weaken the local cultural awareness by enhancing the target language culture. In the 1990s, due to the popularity of western literary thought and the loss of ancient Chinese literary thought, China's modern and contemporary literature and art is in a long-term state of "aphasia". In 2000, professor Cong of Nanjing University first proposed the concept of "Chinese culture aphasia". He discovered that some Chinese scholars with high level of English couldn't express Chinese traditional culture in English in the foreign communication and cooperation, which couldn't demonstrate their profound cultural knowledge and independent cultural style [1]. Later, the scholars made various research on the concept and causes of "Chinese culture aphasia", as well as countermeasures of enhancing the local cultural awareness.

In 2003, professor Chesbrough of Harvard University put forward the term of "open innovation" for the first time. He holds that enterprises can use both internal and external valuable knowledge to speed up internal innovation and use external innovation to expand the market [9]. Compared with the traditional "closed innovation" mode, open innovation has realized the transformation of innovation paradigm. Since then, it has become a hot research field of innovation management in international academic circles. Originally, experts and scholars have carried out a rich research on the definition and types of open innovation. The focus then shifted to empirical research. Change of innovation paradigm in business leads to new tendencies in related education. With introducing active, problem-based learning and a new type of innovation pedagogy, innovation has caused the education paradigm change [10.11].

As a common and imbalance phenomenon in foreign language teaching, local cultural aphasia has aroused wide concern of language teachers and researchers. Therefore, foreign language education should pay close attention to its value trend while attaching importance to intercultural communication competence [12]. In the process of promoting equal cultural communication, we have even more reason to strengthen students' local culture awareness. How to link it with open innovation and reconstruct students' national culture identity? It needs not only theoretical thoughts and exploration, but also empirical research to test its effectiveness and practicality. Combining with English teaching reform based on *Insights into Chinese Culture*, this research will discuss how to enhance students' local cultural awareness from the perspective of open innovation.

## 3. The Main Contents of the Teaching Reform

The open and innovative teaching reform is mainly oriented to the sophomores in School of Translation Studies of Qufu Normal University. The learning materials of Chinese culture will be increased in an Integrated English Course, by using *Insights into Chinese Culture* (English Edition) published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. They are as supplementary materials. *Insights into Chinese Culture* (English Edition) is a cultural book which shows the inner spirit of Chinese culture,

cultural character, life attitude and aesthetic taste of Chinese people. Adding *Insights into Chinese Culture* (English Edition) will not increase class hours for sophomores' Integrated English Course. Classroom teaching and autonomous learning of this book will be timely arranged according to text topics of Integrated English Course. The purpose of the reform is to enable students to fully grasp and understand Chinese culture then enhance students' local cultural awareness. There are two reasons for carrying out the teaching reform for sophomores in their Integrated English Course: first, language and culture are interdependent. Language teaching and cultural teaching are inseparable either. Specific language practice can improve students' intercultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence. Second, the sophomores in School of Translation Studies have a good knowledge of the culture of English speaking countries through 2 semesters' learning. At this point, students' English expression ability of Chinese culture needs to be improved, and students' local cultural awareness needs to be enhanced.

## 4. Research Design

### 4.1. Research Purpose and Problems

On the basis of open innovation concept, this research mainly focuses on enhancing students' local cultural awareness, aiming to establish a new teaching system under a new paradigm. It'll provide a new practical platform for the open and innovative college English teaching and enhance the competitive advantage of English majors. Based on the purpose, the present research attempts to explore the following problems: first, the basic situation of English majors' local cultural awareness; second, the effectiveness of this English teaching reform in promoting students' local cultural awareness.

### 4.2. Subjects of the Research

The subjects involved in the research are two intact classes of 2014 in School of Translation Studies of Qufu Normal University, which are chosen randomly by the author. Class 1 is the experimental group, totally 31 students (27 female students, 4 male students). Class 2 is the control group, totally 30 students (27 female students, 3 male students). The final exam of Integrated English Course of the second semester in 2014-2015 school year is used as pre-test. As shown in Table 1, the average score of the experimental group is 82.64 and that of the control group is 81.23, which means there is no significant difference between the two classes ( $t= 1.71, p>0.05$ ). Thus, there is no significant difference for the two classes' English level before the teaching reform.

**Table 1. Pre-test Scores of Experimental Group and Control Group**

Group	Number	Average score	Standard deviation
experimental	31	82.64	7.31
control	30	81.23	7.64

### 4.3. Methodology

#### 4.3.1. Research Approach

Qualitative and quantitative research methods are used in this study. Qualitative research aims at getting students' attitudes towards the open and innovative English teaching reform by in-depth interviews. In quantitative research, the author sets the open and innovative English teaching as independent variable and the test scores of

competence to express Chinese culture in English as dependent variable. The design of research is described as follows:

$$\frac{E\ 01\ X\ 02}{C\ 03\ Y\ 04} \quad (1)$$

Adopted from Bengtsson [13].

Where:

E= the experimental group

C= the control group

X= treatment by using *Insights into Chinese Culture*

Y= treatment without using *Insights into Chinese Culture*

01= pre-test for the experimental group

02= post-test for the experimental group

03= pre-test for the control group

04= post-test for the control group

#### 4.3.2. Research Instruments

(1) Questionnaire: Based on literature research and focus group discussion, this study designs a questionnaire, aiming at investigating the current situation of students' local cultural awareness. The questionnaire consists of 15 items, including the following 3 parts: the basic information of research objects; the open questions about students' local cultural awareness; and some closed questions.

(2) Test: In this study, the experimental group and the control group are conducted the pre-test and post-test separately. The pre-test scores are obtained from the final exam of Integrated English Course of the second semester in 2014-2015, which has good reliability and validity. In the post-test, test paper about Chinese culture is compiled, in order to test students' English expression ability of Chinese culture. The test items include Chinese food, customs, history, traditional culture and etc.

(3) In-depth interview: After the post-test, the in-depth interviews are conducted with representative testees, aiming to get their attitudes and perceptions of the teaching reform. The interviews mainly include the following contents: Do you think that the teaching reform had any impact on you? Do you have any comments and suggestions on how to enhance students' cultural awareness?

(4) Data analysis technique: In this study, SPSS20.0 is used to conduct descriptive statistics and independent-samples T test, in order to test whether there is significant difference between the experimental group and the control group after the post-test, and whether the teaching reform has a significant impact on enhancing students' cultural awareness.

#### 4.3.3. Research Procedures

First of all, pre-test score statistics and questionnaire survey were conducted respectively for the experimental group and the control group. The questionnaires were collected back in limited time.

Secondly, teaching reform was carried out. In Integrated English Course of the experimental group, the related materials of *Insights into Chinese Culture* were introduced in the open and innovative teaching situation. In this process, contents of the

original teaching materials were restructured, combined with the relevant materials of *Insights into Chinese Culture*. There was no treatment of using *Insights into Chinese Culture* and the concept of open innovation for the control group. Besides this, there were no differences between the experimental group and the control group in teaching time, teaching materials, teaching progress and etc.

Thirdly, post-test and in-depth interviews were conducted. The experimental group and control group were tested by the self-compiled test paper, in order to detect the difference of their English expression ability about Chinese culture. After the post-test, in-depth interviews were conducted to the representative subjects. Before the interview, the subjects were firmly informed that it had nothing to do with the scores, so as to reduce their anxiety.

Lastly, the relevant data were compared and analyzed by using SPSS20.0.

## 5. The Analysis of Research Results

### 5.1. The Analysis of Questionnaire Results

61 questionnaires were given out and collected back before the teaching reform, with the effective response rate of 100%. Statistics of open questions in the questionnaires show that 60.51% of the respondents think they don't know enough about Chinese culture, 74.8% think they lack the knowledge of expressing Chinese culture, 50.68% want to learn more about Chinese traditional culture, and 61.23% think the classroom teaching of English knowledge about Chinese culture is an effective way to improve the expression ability of Chinese culture. The statistical results of closed problems in the questionnaires are shown in table 2.

**Table 2. The statistical results of closed problems in the questionnaires**

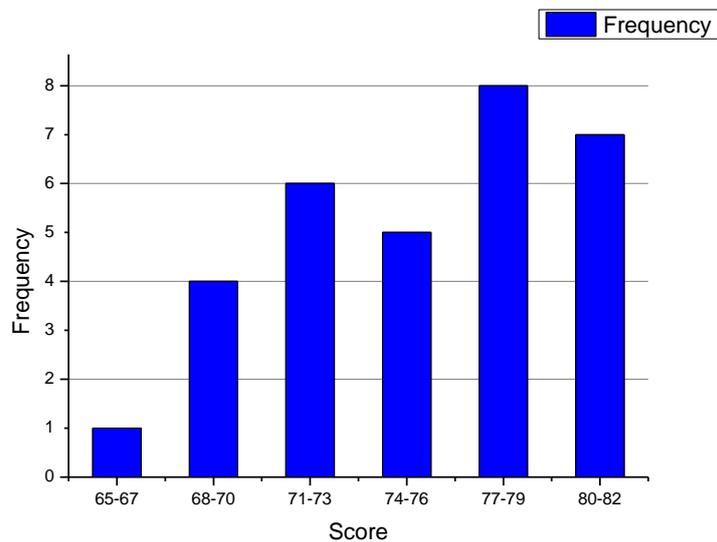
Item	Contents	Answer	<u>The experimental group</u>		<u>The control group</u>	
			Numb	Proportion	Numb	Proportion
1	The relationship between language and culture	A. great relationship	25	80.5	24	81.2
		B. certain relationship	4	12.5	4	11.3
		C. no great relationship	2	7.3	2	7.5
		D. no relationship	0	0	0	0
2	The importance of Chinese culture	A. very important	26	84.5	25	83.6
		B. some importance	5	15.5	5	16.4
		C. less important	0	0	0	0
		D. no importance	0	0	0	0
3	The necessity of learning Chinese culture in English learning	A. Very necessary	25	80.4	24	81.2
		B. certain necessity	5	15	4	12.3
		C. Not very necessary	1	4.6	2	6.5
		D. unnecessary	0	0	0	0
4	The amount of Chinese culture in English Teaching	A. great	1	0.4	0	0
		B. some	7	24.1	6	20
		C. not great	8	25.2	8	26.7

	D. no	15	50.3	16	53.3	
5	The obstacle to the expression of Chinese culture in English	A. great obstacle	26	5.1	26	86.3
		B. some obstacle	4	12.3	3	12.4
		C. no great obstacle	1	2.6	1	1.3
		D. no obstacle	0	0	0	0

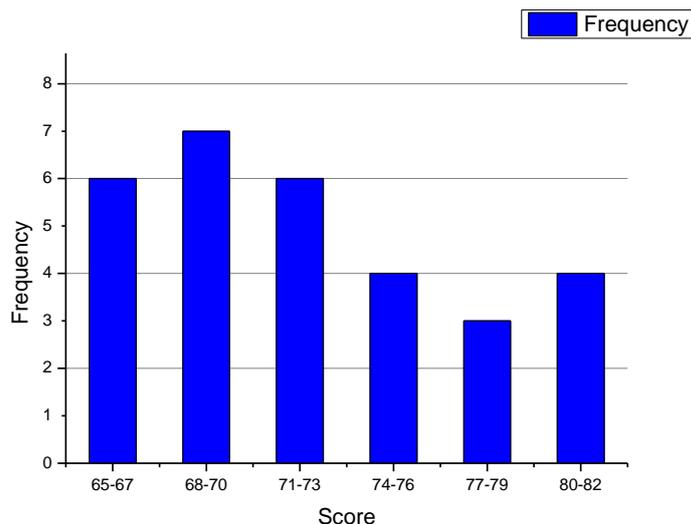
Therefore, college English majors have fully realized the importance of Chinese culture in English learning, and there is an urgent need to learn Chinese culture. Unfortunately, the relevant classroom teaching cannot meet this demand at present, and the local cultural awareness of college English majors is in urgent need of improvement.

### 5.2. Comparative Analysis of Post-test Scores

The analysis of the post-test results is made by the comparative analysis between the experimental group and the control group. The author applied frequency distribution score into charts to make it easier to understand as follows in Figure1 and Figure 2.



**Figure 1. Distribution of Post-test Scores of the Experimental Group**



**Figure 2. Distribution of post-test scores of the control group**

The analysis results are shown in Table 3 and table 4.

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of the Post-test**

Group	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
experimental	31	78.64	12.357	2.165
control	30	70.23	9.645	1.436

It shows in Table 3 that the average post-test scores of the experimental group (78.64) is higher than that of the control group (70.23). The standard deviation shows that the discrete degree of the post-test scores of the control group is lower than that of the experimental group. Therefore, the post-test scores of the two groups are different, which is statistically significant.

**Table 4. Results of Independent-Samples T Test**

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T Test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean diff.	Std. error diff.	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.028	.593	-2.140	58.020	.019	8.410	2.866	-6.137	5.337
Equal variances not assumed			-2.140	56.796	.019	8.410	2.866	-6.140	5.320

The results in Table 4 indicate the t-value to be 2.140. Based on the size of the sample, the value is significant at the .019 level. The author reports the results as:  $t=2.140$ ;  $p \leq .05$ , and therefore draws the conclusion that the difference of the post-test scores

between the two groups is significant. Hence, the treatment of using *Insights into Chinese Culture* in Integrated English Course has significant effect to enhance students' local culture awareness.

### 5.3. In-depth Interview Results Analysis

After the post-test, 12 representative subjects from the experimental group were selected for the in-depth interviews, including 6 subjects who had got higher scores, and 6 who had got lower scores. When describing the impact of this teaching reform on them, 10 subjects thought it was helpful. Among them, 8 subjects believed it not only helped to improve English ability and English expression ability of Chinese culture, but also helped to enhance the sense of mission of Chinese local culture. One subject with lower score thought the teaching reform was not significant. The other subject with lower score had no clear attitude.

The ideas and suggestions of the 12 subjects for the open and innovative English teaching were mainly about the teaching methods, teaching contents and teaching hours, etc. They hoped that this teaching approach could be extended to reading, listening and other related courses, in order to increase the amount of English knowledge about Chinese culture; they also hoped that the teachers' teaching method would be more flexible; they suggested the English course of Chinese culture should be offered.

## 6. The Conclusion

By analyzing the data collected from sampling investigation, the conclusions of this study are as follows:

(1) The current teaching for English majors in China cannot meet the students' demand in their learning of Chinese local culture.

(2) The teaching for English majors under the paradigm of open innovation has a significant impact on the students' local cultural awareness.

(3) With the increasing degree of open innovation in the teaching for English majors, students' ability to express Chinese culture and the local culture awareness are increasing accordingly.

This research is of reference value for the promotion of students' local cultural awareness and the development of open and innovative English teaching. In order to improve students' humanistic quality and enhance their local cultural awareness, English teachers should: first, attach importance to the role of Chinese culture education, and provide students with an open and innovative English environment for learning and using Chinese culture; second, make full use of the openness and diversity of professional textbooks, and strengthen the role of input materials in classroom teaching; then, adjust the form and content of English language ability assessment, and improve the assessment of Chinese cultural expression ability in English appropriately.

In order to improve the ability of expressing Chinese culture, English majors should: firstly, improve the learning and cognitive awareness of Chinese culture, and enhance the sense of Chinese cultural identity; secondly, strengthen the autonomous learning of Chinese cultural, and maintain a certain contact frequency of English in order to reduce the phenomenon of "aphasia of Chinese culture" and then, improve the professional quality and avoid cross-cultural pragmatic failure in the process of learning and communication.

Based on the teaching reform in which *Insights into Chinese Culture* is used, this study investigates the students' local culture awareness from the perspective of open innovation. However, due to some factors, such as the sample size, the individual differences of subjects and etc., there are some limitations on the results. In order to enhance the universality of empirical results, the scope and level of survey sample should be expanded in further study. In addition, the results of this study should be combined with other

classroom teachings for English Majors. A variety of perspectives should be explored to provide more theoretical and practical basis for the open and innovative English teaching.

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